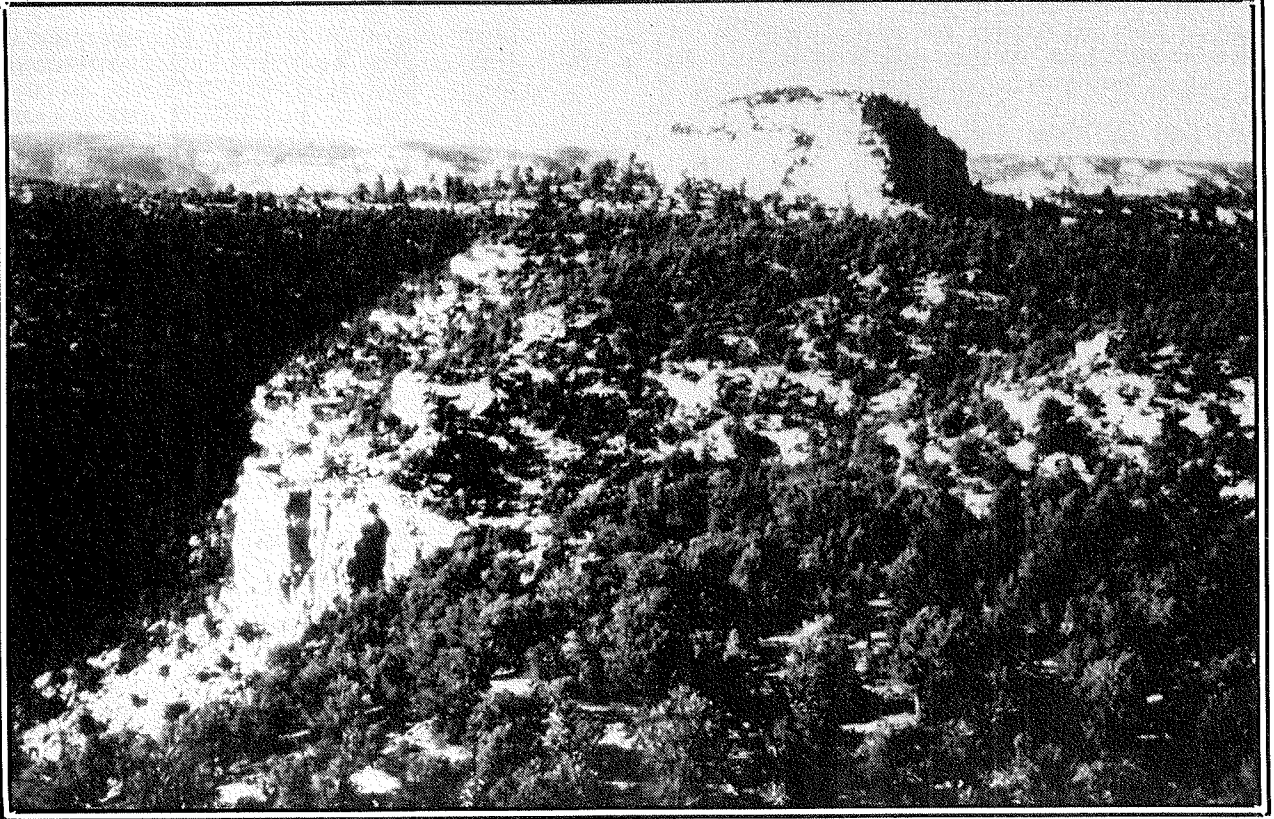








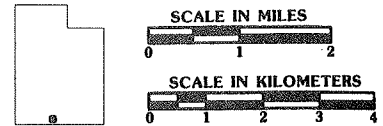
Death Ridge WSA



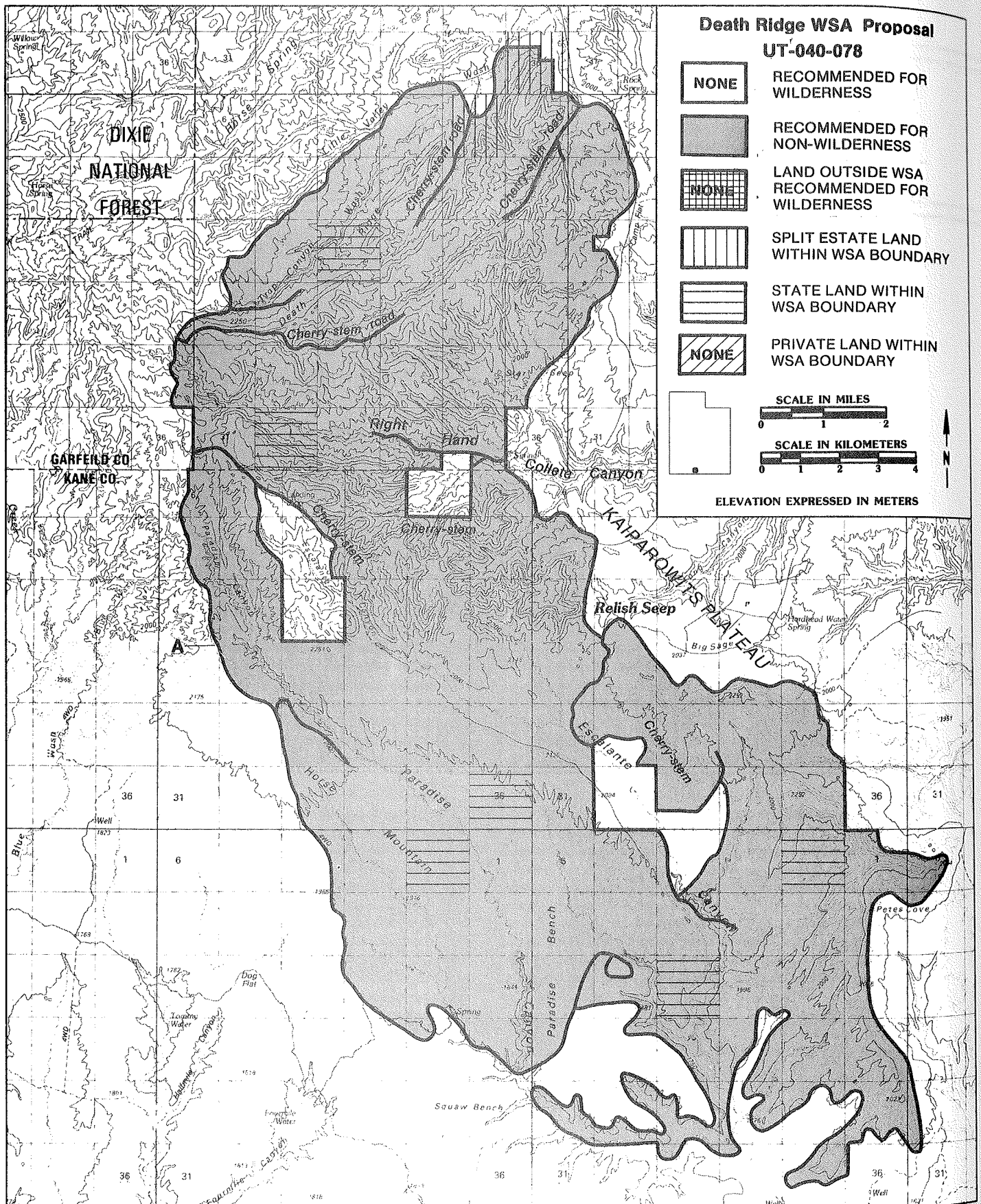
DEATH RIDGE WSA

Death Ridge WSA Proposal UT-040-078

-  NONE RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
-  RECOMMENDED FOR NON-WILDERNESS
-  NONE LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
-  SPLIT ESTATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
-  STATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
-  NONE PRIVATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY



ELEVATION EXPRESSED IN METERS



R. 2 E.

R. 3 E.

October 1991

DEATH RIDGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA: 62,870 acres

The Death Ridge Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-040-078) is in central Garfield and Kane Counties, about 10 miles south of Escalante, Utah (population 662). The unit is a kidney-shaped area about 9 miles from north to south and 8 miles from east to west (see map). The unit is bounded by roads, and is adjacent to Mud Spring Canyon WSA (UT-040-077) to the west and Carcass Canyon WSA (UT-040-076) to the northeast. The WSA includes 62,870 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Six sections of State land (3,841 acres) are inheld in the WSA (see Table 1).

The WSA is part of Kaiparowits Plateau in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province.

The southern part of the WSA consists of benches and canyons and the northern portion is composed of ridges divided by canyons. Elevations in the WSA range from 5,240 feet in the south to almost 8,000 feet in the north. Pinyon-juniper is the main type of vegetation, with scattered sagebrush areas and isolated communities of oak and ponderosa pine.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah

TABLE 1
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA

| WITHIN THE WSA | | ACRES |
|--|--|--------|
| BLM (surface and subsurface) | | 62,870 |
| Split-Estate (BLM surface only)* | | 797 |
| In-holdings (State, Private) | | 3,841 |
| Total | | 67,508 |
| WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY | | |
| BLM (within the WSA) | | 0 |
| BLM (outside the WSA) | | 0 |
| Split-Estate (within the WSA) | | 0 |
| Split-Estate (outside the WSA) | | 0 |
| Total BLM land recommended for wilderness | | 0 |
| In-holdings (State, private) | | 0 |
| WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS | | |
| BLM | | 62,870 |
| Split-Estate | | 797 |
| Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness | | 63,667 |
| In-holdings (State, Private) | | 3,841 |

Source: BLM File Data

* In this report, split-estate lands are defined as only those lands with Federal surface and non-Federal subsurface (minerals). Lands that have Federal minerals but non-Federal surface are classified according to the owner of the surface.

DEATH RIDGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness (no action) alternative, which is the recommendation in this report, and an all wilderness alternative.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

0 acres

(recommended for wilderness)

62,870 acres

(recommended for nonwilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to release the entire area for uses other than wilderness. Designation of the entire area as wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The alternative selected, however would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

All of the study area is in a natural state. About half of the WSA has outstanding opportunities for solitude but none of the study area is considered to have outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation.

The WSA is in the central part of the Kaiparowits Coal Field and about 34 percent (23,244 acres) of the area is leased for coal, with pre-existing rights. Extraction of coal from the Kaiparowits Plateau is not expected in the short term, but any future coal mining would most likely occur on existing leases, including those in the Death Ridge WSA. The long-term future potential for coal extraction is considered to outweigh the wilderness values in the WSA.

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is sub-

stantially noticeable. All 62,870 acres in the WSA meet the criteria for naturalness. Less than 1 percent of the WSA, 628 acres, is affected by imprints, which are substantially unnoticeable. The minor overall disturbances are mostly the result of coal exploration drilling. A helicopter was used to conduct geophysical exploration in 1984, but no surface disturbance or impairment occurred that affected the WSA's naturalness. Also during 1987, a spring development on Horse Spring was authorized. It consisted of developing a seep area, laying 200 feet of plastic pipeline, and placing two water troughs. Approximately one-third acre was disturbed. All work was completed with hand tools and did not impair naturalness. No additional imprints have occurred in the WSA as the result of impairing uses or activities allowed under BLM's Interim Management Policy (IMP).

B. Solitude

Overall, about 50 percent (31,435 acres) of the WSA meets the criterion of solitude for areas under wilderness review. These areas are found in canyons and on divides between drainages. The size and configuration of the WSA, in combination with terrain and vegetation, provide opportunities for solitude. The incised canyon drainages and rugged terrain between some canyons, such as Right Hand Collet Canyon and Escalante Canyon, provides screening. Vegetation screening consists of a dense pinyon-juniper woodland cover in rough areas and small stands of Ponderosa pine elsewhere. Rock outcrops on the plateau also provide screening.

Vegetation complements terrain in providing for solitude in most of the WSA. However, the lower portion of the unit lacks sufficient vegetation or isolating terrain and consequently lacks outstanding opportunities for solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are not outstanding in the WSA. Hiking is the only activity of any importance, but it is rated as moderate rather than outstanding in quality.

DEATH RIDGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

D. Special Features

The diversity of plant life, ranging from low desert shrub to Ponderosa pine, enhances the study and observation of ecology. Three small stands of Ponderosa pine grow in the Alvey Wash drainage in the northeastern portion of the WSA. The Ponderosa pine is adjacent to desert shrub in Alvey Wash and in a tributary to Little Valley Wash. Elevations range from 7,505 feet to 6,500 feet, and pine and desert shrub types can be found in locations less than 1 mile apart. Educational values are present on approximately 2,000 acres. At least two stands of Ponderosa pine also are above the Right Hand Collet Canyon and in the Relish Seep area. Elevations range from 7,526 feet to 6,240 feet, and the distance between the desert shrub and pine types is often less than 1 mile.

The WSA has no known National Register sites, but there is a high potential that such sites exist.

Scenic values are superb in approximately 1,500 acres in the WSA. In the upper portion of Paradise Canyon, the most colorful sandstones in the WSA form the cliffs. The Ponderosa pines growing in the sandstone enhance the scenic value of the area. The canyon in upper Trap Canyon Wash, in the northwestern portion of the WSA, is highly scenic. Two unnamed sandstone monoliths or fins above Alvey Wash are prominent scenic landmarks in the northeastern portion of the WSA. South of Right Hand Collet Canyon, a high sandstone outcrop, an unnamed box canyon immediately below the outcrop, and an adjacent stand of Ponderosa pine provide an area with scenic value.

Peregrine falcons and bald eagles, listed as endangered species, have been reported in the WSA. The WSA has a limited population of cougar.

Nine other animal species and seven plant species that are considered sensitive occur or may occur in the WSA.

Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystem not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is entirely juniper-pinyon woodland (62,870 acres). The PNV in the WSA is represented in the NWPS nationally and in Utah, and in other BLM study areas in Utah and other states.

This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

**TABLE 2
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION**

| BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV) | NWPS AREAS | | OTHER BLM STUDIES | |
|--|------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|
| | AREAS | ACRES | AREAS | ACRES |
| NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE) | | | | |
| Juniper-Pinyon Woodland | 11 | 1,401,745 | 84 | 2,081,135 |
| UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE) | | | | |
| Juniper-Pinyon Woodland | 1 | 26,000 | 53 | 1,643,328 |

Source: BLM File Data.

DEATH RIDGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is not within a 5-hour drive of any major population centers.

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Death Ridge WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January 1987, the NWPS included 64 areas comprising 2,834,115 acres in Utah and Arizona.

There are nine designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA. In a clockwise direction, beginning to the north, are the 26,000-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness (Forest Service [FS]), the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness (FS), the 112,000-acre Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness (BLM), the 40,600-acre Saddle Mountain Wilderness (FS), the 70,500-acre Kanab Creek Wilderness (FS and BLM units), the 6,800-acre Cottonwood Point Wilderness (BLM), and to the west, the 7,000-acre Ashdown Gorge Wilderness (FS), and the 50,000-acre Pine Valley Mountain Wilderness (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being managed effectively to preserve its wilderness character.)

Cherry-stemmed roads penetrate the WSA at several places, resulting in an awkward boundary configuration that would be difficult to survey, recognize on the ground, and manage. The Death Ridge WSA could be effectively managed as wilderness in the foreseeable future. Even though there are 19,381 acres of coal lease, 1,378 acres of pre-FLPMA oil and gas leases and 2,485 acres of post-FLPMA oil and gas lease in the WSA, it is expected that these leases would expire and would not be renewed if the area is designated as wilderness. There are no mining claims in the WSA and development of locatable minerals is not projected in the foreseeable future.

The presence of eight in-held sections of State land in the WSA, including split-estate, could complicate wilder-

ness management in the long-term future. Of the 4,638 acres of in-held State land, 1,921 acres are leased for oil and gas and 1,280 are leased for coal. Because of the known coal resources in the WSA, and some potential for oil and gas, it is projected that new access roads to the State land would be required through the area following wilderness designation. Additionally, any coal mining operations on the State lands and cherry-stems would reduce wilderness values on the adjacent wilderness lands.

Livestock grazing and maintenance of existing facilities including one spring development, 2 miles of fence, two reservoirs, two troughs, and 6 miles of pipeline would continue, but would not significantly affect the wilderness values of the WSA.

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

Because the WSA is not recommended for wilderness designation, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) did not prepare a mineral assessment report for the area.

The entire WSA has a high mineral potential for coal. The entire WSA has a moderate mineral potential for oil, gas, carbon dioxide, geothermal sources, uranium, and gypsum in the subsurface, and a low mineral resource potential for all metals other than titanium and uranium.

According to BLM geologists, the potential for undiscovered oil and gas resources is high, although oil and gas deposits in the WSA are not expected to be large. Movable coal-bearing strata underlie the entire WSA. An estimated 1.587 billion tons of coal are in the WSA, of which about 1.5 billion tons are less than 2,000 feet beneath the surface. The coal is of relatively high quality.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 3) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

DEATH RIDGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Local Social and Economic Considerations

With BLM's no wilderness recommendation, no loss of employment or income would occur. Federal and State revenues would not be reduced. Economic opportunities could be realized through mineral and energy exploration and eventual development in the long term. There would be major beneficial and adverse effects in Garfield and Kane Counties.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 64 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 341 commenters including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

In general, 43 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 293 commenters were opposed. Five commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS, but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the specific features in the WSA, opportunities for solitude, and the value of wilderness as equal to or greater than the existing nonwilderness values. The majority of those commenting in favor of wilderness were from other states. Of particular concern was the need to protect the area from development.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would conflict with or preclude mineral exploration and development, livestock operations, flood control and water rights, public access, or other uses; is not compatible with mul-

tiple use; would harm State/local economies; and that designation is not necessary to protect the WSA. The great majority of those opposed were from rural Utah.

No Federal agencies commented on this WSA.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are six State sections (3,841 acres) and two sections (797 acres) of split-estate lands with State minerals in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State considers the Death Ridge WSA to have low wilderness values and very high conflicts with potential coal development.

The Kane and Garfield County Commissions are opposed to wilderness designation of the Death Ridge WSA and have endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. In commenting on the Draft EIS the Counties supported BLM's no action/no wilderness proposed action.

The Kane County Master Plan rejects wilderness as an exclusionary form of recreation that cannot be used by the average visitor. Garfield County previously proposed to the Utah Congressional Delegation that 111,053 acres of BLM lands in three WSAs and 31,600 acres in one FS unit in the County be recommended as wilderness. The Garfield County Master Plan recommends that the remaining lands in the County, including the Death Ridge WSA, be retained for multiple uses.

DEATH RIDGE WSA

Table 3
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

| Issue Topic | Alternatives | |
|--|--|---|
| | Recommendation No Action/No Wilderness | All Wilderness (62,870 Acres) |
| Impacts on Wilderness Values | Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation and loss would occur as intrusions increase. In the short term, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 305 acres because of vegetation treatments, rangeland projects, and construction of access roads to State lands and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to 1,886 acres. Special features, including scenic values, special status species, educational values, and wildlife associated with wilderness would not be significantly affected. In the long term, coal development would result in direct loss of wilderness values on 40 acres and an indirect reduction on up to an additional 20,800 acres in the eastern portion of the WSA. | Wilderness designation would preserve wilderness values overall in the WSA. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 4 acres because of construction of access roads to in-held State lands. Wilderness values would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to 1,257 acres. Wilderness values would be temporarily affected on 1 acre by rangeland projects but the wilderness management criteria would be met. Special features would be preserved. |
| Impacts on Vegetation | Special status plant species would not be significantly affected. Less than 1 percent (345 acres) of the pinyon-juniper woodland and sagebrush type in the WSA would be altered as a result of rangeland projects, construction of access roads and long term coal development. Therefore, there would not be significant changes in the vegetation types in the WSA. | Implementation of the All Wilderness Alternative would not significantly affect the vegetation resource in the WSA. Vegetation types and special status plant species would be protected because potential disturbance would be reduced to 5 acres. |
| Impacts on Mineral and Energy Exploration and Production | Implementation of the No Action/No Wilderness Alternative would not adversely affect mineral exploration or production because minerals could be leased, claimed, and developed as at present. | Wilderness designation would preclude potential development of about 800 million tons of recoverable coal. Loss of exploration and development opportunities for other mineral and energy resources would not be significant because the probability of development is low even if the area is not designated as wilderness. |

DEATH RIDGE WSA

Table 3 (Continued)
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

| Issue Topic | Alternatives | |
|---|---|---|
| | Recommendation No Action/No Wilderness | All Wilderness (62,870 Acres) |
| Impacts on Wildlife Habitat and Populations | Wildlife habitat and populations including special status animal species would not be significantly affected. Implementation of the vegetation treatment project would benefit wildlife by providing additional forage and ecotones. Less than 1 percent (345 acres) of the wildlife habitat in the WSA would be disturbed. | Wilderness designation would preclude 300 acres of vegetation treatment which would improve wildlife habitat, but designation would provide all species with additional opportunities for solitude. Only 5 acres of wildlife habitat would be disturbed in the WSA. |
| Impacts on Livestock Management | Livestock management and grazing levels would not be adversely affected because access and management practices would continue as at present. Approximately 300 acres of seeding that would provide 46 AUMs of forage could be done. | Wilderness designation would not significantly affect current livestock management practices. Restricting motorized use of the 18 miles of way could increase management costs and inconvenience 20 permittees. The opportunity for an increase of 46 AUMs through vegetation treatments would be foregone. |
| Impacts on Economic Conditions | No loss of employment or income would occur. Federal and State revenues would not be reduced. Economic opportunities could be realized through mineral and energy exploration and eventual development in the long term. There would be major beneficial and adverse effects in Garfield and Kane Counties. | Wilderness designation would not significantly affect present local or regional economic conditions. However, new leasing in the WSA would not be allowed; therefore, potentially significant sales and revenues from coal would be foregone. Over the long term, coal development and associated beneficial and adverse economic impacts would not occur. This would significantly change future economic conditions in Kane and Garfield Counties from what they would be without wilderness designation. |